

Underneath the Starry Sky

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Her head had only just hit the pillow when exhaustion claimed her. She sank like a stone into the mattress, burying her head in her pillow, and her last coherent thought was a silent plea for her baby

daughter to finally allow her a few precious hours of sleep.

She'd spent more time awake than asleep over the last few weeks, and she was nearing her internal breaking point. She'd never had any allusions that motherhood would be easy, or that the first few months after the birth of their child would be anything other than absolute hell on earth. She'd tried to prepare herself " mentally, if not physically " for the long slog ahead, because she knew that, from the moment she gave birth, her life would no longer be her own.

Still, nothing had prepared her for the pure exhaustion of it all, the sleep deprivation on top of lethargy on top of fatigue. She'd had a few crying jags of her own, feeling helpless and useless and worthless even as she held her crying baby in her arms, and no amount of telling herself that "this too shall pass" was helping anymore. If there was a light at the end of the tunnel, she could no longer see it.

She'd almost been afraid to sleep, afraid that she wouldn't wake up in time " or at all " but she was well past the point of caring now. Her body was demanding rest, lest she fall apart completely.

She felt as if she'd only just closed her eyes when the first soft, telltale whimpers started to emanate from the bedside bassinet. "Nooo," she protested, rolling over onto her stomach, pressing the sides of her pillow over her ears. Tears prickled in the corners of her eyes. "Please, don't!"

Her daughter ignored her pleas, of course, the whimpering quickly escalating into blubbering, well on the way to practically howling her discontent with the world.

Suddenly, she felt the mattress shift beneath her, and she blindly looked up, reaching out for her husband. Her hand met the warmth of the rumpled sheets he'd left in his wake, and somehow, he was already on the other side of the bed, making soothing noises as he lifted their crying baby into his arms.

"C'mon, princess," she heard him say, their daughter's sobs muffling as he gathered her close, "we need to let Mommy sleep."

Their daughter was having none of it, her wails still earnest and heartrending and world-ending, even as he walked around their room, still murmuring to her in pacifying tones. She understood his hesitation in leaving; it was at her insistence that they'd set up their daughter's bassinet in their room, driven mostly by her fear of not being able to hear her if she cried out in the middle of the night.

She knew now, of course, that it had been a silly fear, and she wouldn't mourn the day their baby outgrew the bassinet. They'd already assembled a crib in the room next door, and she was looking forward to having her own space again.

She felt herself relax as her daughter began to wind down, mercifully " _finally_ " responding to her father's soft coaxing. As he circled back towards the bassinet, she recognized the song that he was singing.

"Come the night, we're all just children / underneath the starry sky," he crooned in a soft, lilting voice, "come the night, we are no different / you and I, you and I / come the night"

She sighed, cracking her eyes open just long enough to see him gently lower their now-quiet baby back into the bassinet, taking his time to arrange the blankets around her. Her eyes fell closed again as he continued to sing, and she found herself being lulled to sleep as well.

"Come the night, lay down your burden," he continued, his voice drifting closer and closer to her, "come the night when work is done"

She only just felt the brush of his fingers on her brow as the slumber she craved finally claimed her, the last few words floating around her, ethereal yet poignant: "Come the night, forget your battles, lost or won"

End
file.